

Conference Paper

Theoretical Foundations and Collective Programme of Constructivism in Russian Avant-garde Painting

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Abstract

Russian art studies traditionally approach Constructivism as a movement that was opposed to Suprematism. The author of this article, however, believes that both of these movements shared a number of characteristics. They both originated in the Cubist aesthetics and rejected traditional figurative art. They both sought to discover the 'new way of seeing' in their effort to develop original painting techniques for this novel multi-dimensional reality. The author demonstrates how the Constructivists put these principles into practice. Constructivists and Suprematists adhered to similar principles and adopted similar techniques when working with material. As a result, in their search for a new style, they tended to follow similar paths. Their creative method is based on dissolving visible forms into the simplest (geometrical) primary elements and recombining these fragments into the new reality. This inevitably raised the question about the relationship between art and life. Constructivists went even further and proposed the ideology of 'production art', that is, art that served a practical purpose for the society. Thus, the key Constructivist concepts and ideas were determined by the problems that this movement sought to address - these were the same problems which their precursors (Cubists and Suprematists) had failed to solve. Constructivism was, therefore, the next stage in the development of Russian Modernism.

Keywords: evolution of Suprematism, Constructivism in painting, artistic programme of Russian avant-garde

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1. Introduction

In Russian art studies, Constructivism is commonly described as a unique phenomenon determined exclusively by the specific political and ideological situation of Soviet Russia in the 1920s. Most researchers do not support the idea of continuity that existed between Constructivist and other avant-garde movements, pointing out that

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they developed independently of each other. E.Bobinskaya describes this common view the following way: 'The traditional scheme of progressive development does not apply to many movements and periods in the twentieth-century culture. Instead, there was a kaleidoscope of interactions, reflections, scintillations, and recurring patterns' (Bobinskaya 2016, 11). In her study, Bobinskaya focuses on the problems of identity and boundaries of art and approaches Constructivism as a radical break with figurative art and as an attempt to reach beyond what was considered the traditional territory of art. She defines Constructivism not on the basis of its style or method but as a 'specific type of art in which the work of an artist was likened to that of an engineer, to the production process' (Bobinskaya 2016, 121). According to O.A.Yushkova, if we use the term 'Constructivism' to refer to a certain movement with its own discernible style, we should distinguish between the sphere of architecture and painting. For painting O.A.Yushkova proposes the term 'constructivity', which denotes a trend comparable with the method of structuralist analysis. An artist creates a work of art out of a range of semantically connected elements organized hierarchically according to formal criteria ([8], 166-167). E.Sidorina also points out that Constructivism emphasized the skill and technique involved in creating artworks, their so-called 'constructedness' or careful organization of constitutive elements. Such approach was highly characteristic of the arts in the 1920s since it resonated with the spirit of the time and captured the collective urge to build a new world [5].

Constructivism as a movement is believed to have been launched by the First Working Group of Constructivists (Alexey Gan, Alexandr Rodchenko, and Varvara Stepanova) and their work at the Institute of Artistic Culture (INKhUK) (1921-1922), where they developed their ideas of combining purely artistic forms with the technological process of creating utilitarian objects. Sometimes the beginning of Constructivism is also associated with the publication of Alexey Gan's brochure 'Constructivism' (1922). An alternative origin can be found in the first exhibition of the self-proclaimed group of Constructivists (Konstantin Medunetsky, Vladimir and Georgi Stenberg) in Moscow in 1921. Their catalogue contained a manifesto which laid down the aims and the corresponding principles of the so-called 'production art'. Some researchers see Vladimir Tatlin as a precursor of Constructivism, pointing out that the beginning of this movement coincided with his project of the Monument to the Third International (Tatlin's Tower) [5].

Constructivism, however, cannot be reduced to specific groups or exhibitions. As for its theoretical foundations, it is hard to find any in the manifestos of those artists who proclaimed themselves to be Constructivists. For example, the book by Alexey

Gan 'Constructivism', published in Tver in 1922, contrary to expectations, tells us little about the principles followed by the Group (Alexandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Lyubov Popova). For the most part, the text consists of lengthy quotations from the Communist Manifesto and slogans. On the first page of the book the author announces: 'This publication is an agitational book in which the Constructivists declare war to supporters of traditional art' [2].

We believe that the theoretical foundations of Constructivism were determined by the practice of easel painting. Moreover, ideas of Constructivism can be found in programmes of its precursors, in particular Suprematism. Putting aside architecture and production art, let us now focus on painting and the authors who shared goals and views on the methods of constructing a painting.

Constructivism is traditionally viewed - primarily because of what avant-garde artists wrote in their manifestos - in contradistinction with Suprematism. In their manifestos, Constructivists dissociated themselves from Suprematism for ideological reasons. Thus, the Constructivist programme was seen by art critics as radically different from that of its predecessors. If we take a closer look at Constructivist art, however, we will see that the forms and style these artists used were very similar to Suprematist geometrical abstractions, even though the aims proclaimed by these movements often seem to be mutually exclusive. We will further show that not only specific techniques but also collective programme statements and opinions voiced by certain artists reflect principles, ideas, and even goals shared by Constructivist and Suprematist art. The principles of the experimental practice adopted in Constructivism originated in Cubism. In this case, avant-garde movements can hardly be regarded just as a product of individual creative imagination, they rather express certain ideologies. We believe that the development of any new movement is based on the achievements and discoveries of its predecessors. Objectives that the previous generations failed to meet serve as a point of departure for further experimentation with materials, methods and style.

2. Programme

Almost all avant-garde movements initially emphasized their unique and innovative character and posed as pioneers and inventors of a new manner in art. Kazimir Malevich seems to be the only artist who believed that painting followed a pattern of evolutionary development, in which each new movement made a step towards annihilating the narrative, objectness, and semblance to real life. In his theoretical articles, Malevich

presented Suprematism as the logical conclusion of the explorations made by Cubism and Futurism and the discovery of a new way of creating art forms. In this respect 'The Square' was naturally perceived as the 'zero degree' of painting, as a point on the coordinate axis which does not have its own numerical value but which signifies the end of the old and the beginning of the new art. The invention of Cubism was thought of as a point of no return beyond which art could not remain the same. Breaking with figurative painting, the Cubists believed that they would create forms that had been unknown before and that would constitute the art of the future.

All three movements (Cubism, Suprematism, and Constructivism) not only rejected the experience that had been accumulated in the history of art but revolutionized the social role of the art. The Cubists did not associate their artistic experiments with any aesthetic activity. Picasso compared this new method in painting to scientific analysis that dissects nature and examines it, to cognitive mechanisms of a scientific discovery. Picasso said that he had to 'cut an object open' in order to see its essence, like a child breaking a toy in order to see what is hidden inside it. The artist was no longer seen as a creator of pictorial art: 'There can be no question of painting in Suprematism; painting was done for long ago, and the artist himself is the prejudice of the past' (Malevich 2014, 53). Throughout his manifesto, Alexey Gan passionately repeats his idea about the death of art, probably not realizing how close he is to the views of Kazimir Malevich. Gan declared 25 October 1917 to be the beginning of a new era which he expected to be a revolution in art, following the revolution in the political and social spheres. He insisted that fine art should be replaced by art production. Painting should be transformed into other kinds of activities. Thus, Gan's manifesto was a variation on the theme of 'The Black Square' that was also supposed to mark the beginning of the new era. Konstantin Medunetsky's group in their manifesto 'The Constructivists Address the World' (1921) repeated the same slogans proclaiming 'art and its priesthood outlaw'. He called Constructivism 'a springboard for the leap towards a universal culture' ([4], 180).

Such grandiose aspirations show that avant-garde artists not only believed in the power of art but also believed in its ability to create a new world. Alexey Gan proclaimed that through artistic work Constructivists will be able to build the future. Malevich also considered Suprematism as a programme for building future life, as a way to transform the world, even though he did not directly associate these aims with ideology. El Lissitzky in his article 'Suprematism of World Building' wrote that the artist was to become the creator of the 'new world that does not exist yet, that we are giving birth

to and that will grow through the universe and is only starting to flesh out' ([6, 7], Vol.3, 143).

In order to initiate the transformation of the world the artists had to transform themselves primarily through discovering a new way of seeing, which should also be learnt by the audience. The Cubists demanded to put an end to the 'shameful dependence of painting on vision', meaning that visual perception is based on our perception of real objects. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger thought that it was vulgar to search for familiar objects in painting and that artists should free themselves and others of banal representations of things. The idea of a 'new vision' appealed to Vladimir Tatlin as well. In his 'Letter to the Futurists' (1918) he wrote the following: 'Since 1912 I have been urging members of my profession to improve their vision' ([6, 7], Vol.3, 877), that is, to learn to see in a novel way. Later, in his article 'The Work That Awaits Us' (1921) he put forward the following idea: 'We announce our distrust of the eye and place our sensual impressions under control' ([6, 7], Vol.3, 878). What he means here is the demand for a new, augmented perception that involves other senses. Malevich, together with his friend, experimentator and composer Mikhail Matyushin, also developed the concept of 'extended vision' in art. Masters of non-figurative art taught their followers and students to train their eye to see many surrounding objects at once, capturing multiple minute details as well as vast panoramas and perceiving all this as a whole. They sought to develop in themselves particular sensitivity to the fourth dimension and to learn to observe and to comprehend this new level of reality.

The idea of intricately organized space-time continuum eluding our perception seemed particularly appealing to representatives of the three movements. The theories of Hermann Minkowski, Albert Einstein and Henri Poincaré were widely discussed in the studios of Le Bateau Lavoir in Montmartre. Picasso and Braque rejected the traditional technique of perspective that imitated real life and instead tried to present a new reality in their paintings. The Suprematists emphasized the sensory perception of space. Explicit interest of Constructivism in geometrical forms and mathematical dimensions seems natural since exponents of this movement admired and incorporated scientific knowledge into their vision. Inspired by Minkowski's theory, Sergey Kalmykov insisted on the universal method in his 'mathematical painting' and even wrote a theoretical treatise 'Study of the Four-Dimensional World From the Painter's Point of View' (1920) ([3], Vol.1, 404-405). The tasks artists pursued tended to become more and more complex. The Cubists presented objects from several angles, Michail Matyushin was taken by the idea of observing all the surrounding objects simultaneously while Malevich sought to 'break free from the sphere of the Earth' as if

he wanted to contemplate the planet from the infinite outer space. The Constructivists, in their turn, strove to reveal the multidimensionality of the real space.

To sum up, we can outline the following programme that all three art movements shared: after proclaiming the 'death of art' and repudiating figurative painting, Constructivist artists set about 'opening' the fourth dimension and training the eye to see the world as multidimensional. To accomplish this, they had to transform the 'physiology of vision' to be able to see what was lying beyond everyday visual experience. This new way of perception would inevitably result in new means of expression and the new language of art. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger insisted that Cubism was a new way of representing objects. The Suprematists created a new way of representation - forms created by the 'intuitive reason' or what Malevich called 'the new realism in painting' [Malevich, 2014, p.26]. According to Gan, 'artistic work' that had to replace art as a remnant of the past required 'new means of artistic expression' ([2], 52).

The practical realization of the Cubist, Suprematist and Constructivist programmes revealed the similarity of their underlying principles, which becomes even more obvious if we analyze the art works these movements produced.

3. Style and Method

The refusal to depict the objective world led to the invention of a new expressive language in art. Previous aesthetic choices and techniques were reproduced by the Russian Cubo-Futurists and continued to exist as artistic strategies in the 1910s and 1920s. The Cubists were trying to show an object from multiple vantage points and break it down into multiple planes in the single dimension of the canvas. Cubist paintings produced an austere impression: lines were used to show the boundaries of planes and the space gave no illusion of depth so the pictures resembled technical drawings or schemes. Cubist artists sought to disassemble a visual image into its separate parts - components of the structure - to make it clearly visible. The artists sensed the opportunities that Analytical Cubism offered and actively used the word 'construction' long before it became a buzzword for manifestos. This word often appears in the names of Cubo-Futurist artworks: for example, N.Udaltsova. 'Female Nude. Cubist Construction' (1914); I.Klyun. 'Construction' (late 1910s); D.Zagoskin. 'Cubism. Painterly Construction' (1918). Not surprisingly, this method highlighted the aesthetic effect of lines and the clear rhythm of the composition and shifted attention towards the sphere of graphics. Objects were dissected into small facets, revealing their structure, which made the forms of the objects look simplified in a geometrical way. Artists (K.V.Yoganson 'Electric

Chain' (1921); D.E.Zagoskin 'Construction of the Lamp' (1918)) made their paintings resemble schematic technical drawings and compared themselves to engineers.

Artists disassembled objects into their structural components and then reassembled them, after reorganizing all their parts. The search for 'primary elements' was particularly characteristic of the Russian avant-garde. All forms of the real world must be annihilated, destroyed to the very atoms of the matter, including the pictorial matter, in order to create a new better world: 'Everything has disappeared: a mass of material is left from which a new form will be built'. (Malevich 2014, 32). Undoubtedly, colour lies at the core of the pictorial matter but colour is inconceivable without form. According to Malevich, an evenly painted surface makes the colour more vivid (volume makes the colour stronger only in one point that is closer to the viewer while the rest of the surface seems darker or lighter, which means that the perception of colour is distorted). Lissitzky considered a geometrical form as the simplest of all forms, therefore, coloured geometrical shapes served as the basis in Suprematist painting while the square, as the primary element of the pictorial matter. Constructivists tried to achieve the maximum degree of generalization and schematicity and proclaimed the line was the new element of construction. Rodchenko saw the line as the carcass, foundation or system, as 'the first and last, both in painting and in any construction at all'; 'the line is the path of passing through, movement, collision, edge, attachment, joining, sectioning' ([8], 177). The line creates the visual image of a structure.

The Cubists confined themselves to dissolving reality into fragments while the Suprematists took the deconstruction even further by searching for elementary particles - the primal matter to create a new artistic reality. Organization and arrangement of elements (the simplest geometrical forms and colour) is realized in construction. According to Lissitzky, material acquires its form through construction. '...Art is the ability to construct...on the basis of weight, speed and the direction of movement', Malevich argued in his early manifesto of 1916. 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting' (Malevich 2014, 14).

While working with primary elements, an artist builds new worlds and feels as a creator of a reality that has never existed before. But then the question arose as to what was the relation between this new reality and the actual reality. This question was central to all the three movements and was closely linked to the question about the value of art, which is by no means determined by its subject or narrative or by its semblance to reality. Almost all avant-garde movements took as a point of departure the idea that the value of an artwork lies in such qualities as its colour, texture (*faktura*) and composition. For the Constructivists and Suprematists, however, this was

a matter of principle even though there were some differences in their understanding of the value of an artwork. For French Cubists, the painting itself with its material body (canvas, frame, layers of colour, and collage fragments) was an independent object soon to become a new element of the reality that, instead of being 'borrowed' from nature, was created entirely by an artist. Braque and Picasso believed that the value of a painting resided in itself.

The painterly reality of the Suprematists was based on independent existence of the forms they created. 'In the art of Suprematism, forms will live, like all living forms of nature', Malevich wrote (Malevich 2014, 32). The value of art resides in the painted surface of the canvas, which attracts our attention to the flat surface. This new reality, however, is not limited only to the plane of the painting. In its 'coloured stage' (sometimes referred to as Dynamic Suprematism), Suprematism exploded the surface and eliminated colour because they represented spatial limitations. The white background of the coloured Suprematism implies that geometrical figures are floating in bottomless space. We perceive their distorted forms as projections of the movement (for example, a trapezoid as a projection of a receding rectangle, and so on). The Suprematists overcame the flatness of the surface, exploded the three-dimensional, perspectival space and strove to represent the new dimension ('White on White', 1918). The transition from one-dimensional surfaces to articulation of the real volume can be illustrated by Lyubov Popova's cycle 'Painterly Architectonic' (1918). In her works, Suprematist flat figures look like three-dimensional geometrical bodies. This trend was later continued in El Lissitzky's 'Prouns' and in Gustav Klutis's 'Axonometric Painting'.

The Suprematists were not the only ones who were trying to overcome flatness as it became obvious at the last exhibition of Futurist painting '0.10' (*Zero-Ten*) in 1915. The new three-dimensional objects reflected the Cubists' idea of the independent reality of an object created by an artist. Jean Pougny (Ivan Puni) exhibited his 'White Sphere' - geometrical volume in its pure form, representing nothing but itself, devoid of any additional meanings. At the same exhibition Vladimir Tatlin demonstrated his experimental constructions with materials which he first called 'material selections', then 'painterly reliefs' and later 'counter-reliefs'. Similar constructions were presented by Jean Pougny (Ivan Puni). The artists seem to stretch the flat figures of their Suprematist compositions into the three-dimensional format. Counter-reliefs were conceived of as an opposition to sculpture, showing the artist's intention to compare colour and form and investigate the possibilities of texture or the so-called *faktura* (a term that was used to denote how materials were handled in the process of art creation). The reliefs were contrasted with painting with its deceptive illusory perspective. 'Painterly reliefs'

of Vladimir Tatlin presented real volume created by real materials in real space. The object itself was the ultimate reality.

The Suprematists believed that what they did - used primary elements to construct structures - was a 'style-forming' activity, meaning that they applied a system of specific techniques to create a coherent whole with its own distinct features. Tatlin intended to let the materials and their qualities guide the process of art production. Such experience of working with forms soon turned into something of a method or an algorithm in which the application of various techniques became a way of revealing the materials' own qualities. Malevich was not satisfied with this approach: 'Processing of material surfaces is the psychosis of contemporary artists' (Malevich 2014, 57). Tatlin worked not as a painter but rather as an engineer and inventor who selected materials that would be suitable and would possess the required characteristics ('colour, texture, density, elasticity, weight, and strength'). In his 'corner counter-reliefs', Tatlin seems to be testing how much stress a material can withstand: he stretches ropes, sheets of metal and rods as if to test their resistance and to estimate the elasticity of his construction. In these works his attention was focused not on the properties of specific materials but on the 'dialogue' between them. Later he took an interest in the 'organization of material, in which its components interacted organically with the surrounding space' ([6, 7], Vol.3, 878).

After pictorial space had disappeared, the object was placed in the real space and it had to be semantically connected with reality. Tatlin took this idea further in his slogan 'Art Into Life', which reflected the evolution of the whole Constructivist programme. After having broken with their former mentor Malevich, the group (Lyubov Popova, Olga Rosanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova) united behind their new leader and felt it necessary to create art that would exist in the social environment, in the real living space. Tatlin spoke of 'functional constructiveness' of any art form. His 'material selections' were built in a such a way that no element could be extracted without destroying their wholeness, like a mechanism in which every part is indispensable. Following Tatlin, other Constructivists also overtly emphasized artificiality, 'constructedness' and mechanistic organization of their works. Tatlin's idea of functional constructiveness was transformed into the rule of utilitarian necessity. Thus, the study of properties of materials for their own sake became no longer important but now had a more pragmatic purpose of putting these materials to practical use.

The value of painting as such was doubted. At the 1921 exhibition '5x5=25' (Varvara Stepanova, Alexandr Vesnin, Alexandr Rodchenko, Lyubov Popova, and Alexandra Exter), the artists signed a manifesto condemning 'pure' and 'useless' art and claiming

that their works were test models for producing utilitarian objects even though these works were created according to the principles of pictorial art. 'Our works only depict constructions but the real construction means constructing things and buildings in space', Rodchenko contended ([8], 181). To prove this, Rodchenko exhibited geometrical constructions ('Line', 'Cage') and three non-figurative monochromes ('Pure Red Colour', 'Pure Yellow Colour' and 'Pure Blue Colour'), which had the collective title of 'The Last Painting' or 'The Death of Painting'. The artist called them 'smooth boards' to emphasize that they were not art objects but just objects devoid of any meaning, allusions, and associations. It is impossible to evaluate the pictorial qualities of the surface since 'the line conquered everything and destroyed the last citadels of painting - colour, tone, texture, and surface'. Saying this, Rodchenko defied the Suprematist program of Malevich: 'I affirmed: it's all over. Basic colors. Every plane is a plane and there is to be no representation'.

Rodchenko once and for all turned stylistic work with Suprematist forms into a method and invented new ways of creating art that were more suitable for production. Instead of a brush, Rodchenko used a paint roller, imitating the work of a house painter. This way Rodchenko proclaimed that painting is worthless as well as pure art. An artist should create utilitarian things for real use. This idea underpinned the programme of production art for all Constructivists. Konstantin Medunetsky's group followed the same path. Exposition 'Constructivists' (1922) reflected the general shift of attention from flat surfaces to volume and the affirmation of spatial objects as an independent reality. The catalogue of the exhibition listed three kinds of works: 'colour-constructions' (paintings), 'projects for spatial constructions' (graphic art) and 'constructions of spatial structures' (sculptural works). The artists' interest in the existence of an art object in the real space and in the properties of materials was bound to bring them to the concept of utility in art.

Even though the Constructivists continued working in the sphere of easel painting and used the Suprematist stylistic techniques, they intended to make a definitive statement about their opposition to Suprematism. In 1921 there arose a debate about composition and construction. Visually, they are quite difficult to distinguish. Theoretical investigations conducted by the artists also failed to clarify this question: По Родченко был затеян спор discussing the meaning of the term 'construction', those artists who considered themselves exponents or the founders of this movement, did not provide any substantiated or even comprehensible explanations. For his programme in the discipline 'Construction', which he was teaching at INKhUK, Alexandr Rodchenko wrote propaganda-style slogans, which give us little idea of his teaching

objectives: 'construction is the modern world view'; 'Constructivist life is the art of the future'; and 'construction is the modern requirement for organization and utilitarian use of material' ([5], 66). The same can be said about the first program of Alexey Gan's first group of Constructivists ([6, 7], Vol.1, 865-866) and his brochure 'Constructivism' [2]. Neither of them pays any attention to creative principles of Constructivism.

This movement might have felt no need to provide a theoretical foundation for their creative method since it was already described in detail in the articles by Kazimir Malevich. If we take a closer look at Gan's text, it will become evident that he is describing the same means that were used by the Suprematists. Gan does not lose sight of the value of painting, although he gives a different interpretation of its effects. According to Gan, 'retaining the lasting material and formal basis of art such as colour, line, surface, volume and movement, artistic work materialistically directed will become, in conditions of expedient activity and intellectual-material production, capable of opening new means of artistic expression' ([2], 52) In his programme, Gan suggests establishing three disciplines - 'Tectonics, *Faktura*, and Construction' - so that 'the Constructivists could in a scientific and organized way master the practice of construction'. He repeats this formula like a mantra throughout the manifesto and only at the end of the text briefly outlines the Constructivist understanding of these terms, again resorting to the propagandist style: 'the tectonics is his guiding star, the brain of experimental and practical activity'. Gan's description of tectonics as 'a synonym for the organic' and 'explosion from an inner being' might be interpreted as an attempt to explain that the external form is somehow determined from the inside by a certain essence or function. In Cubism, forms of objects are determined by their inner structure. It is this inner structure that should shape the outward perception of an object. In a similar manner, in the process of creating an object of art the Cubists strove to move from the inner to the outward. Likewise, Malevich created his forms by revealing the inherent properties of the material itself. His compositions seem to emerge in a natural way as if guided by an objective need, growing into an organic whole through the mediation of the artist.

The second element - *faktura* - also was not entirely a Constructivist invention. The Suprematists were particularly interested in pictorial *faktura* from the very beginning and later came to understand it as the usage of various materials. Giving precedence to the Cubists, who were the first to 'put into the picture cement and concrete and home-made iron constructions', El Lissitzky writes in his article 'Suprematism in World Reconstruction' the following: 'The new element which we (Suprematists) have brought

to the fore in our painting - *faktura* - will be applied to the whole of this still-to-be-built world' ([6, 7], Vol.3, 43-48). Alexey Gan expands this term referring to 'the whole process of working with material'. It is a 'consciously selected material used for a specific purpose' ([2], 52). Gan uses the term 'construction' to denote a physical embodiment of the author's creative vision; for him construction is the key function of artistic work. Gan believed that what distinguished his work from that of Suprematists with their concept of 'pure art' was not his method but the conceptual principle underlying his work, his intention to make art socially useful. As for the programmes and their practical implementation, they proved to be more or less identical: ranging from the repudiation of figurative and narrative art to the composition principles. In his brief essay on Kazimir Malevich, Gan gave credit to the master by pointing out that he was the one who 'cleaned the painting from all non-painterly forms, that is, got rid of objectness and the narrative; he was the first to use geometrical forms, to experiment with their combinations to show volume and space, that is, he set the principles of painterly constructions' ([6, 7], Vol.1, 924-925). Thus, despite the opinions of his fellow artists Alexandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova, Alexey Gan gives the credit to the Suprematists who laid the foundation for further artistic experiments. Describing Malevich's innovative techniques, which were inherited by Constructivism, Gan puts his own movement in the general context of avant-garde aesthetics.

4. Conclusion

Despite their seemingly contradictory statements and the differences in their approaches to art, the Constructivists and Suprematists were trying to address similar artistic goals by choosing similar ways, which originated from Cubism. The point of departure for all these movements was the autonomous value of their material: its colour, form, *faktura*, and structure (composition or construction). Initially, they focused on those aesthetic parameters that determined the value of an artwork. The Cubists regarded a painting as an object created by an artist and existing as an independent phenomenon of the real world. Regardless of its aesthetic qualities, such object-painting is useless (Pablo Picasso returned his collages made of sand and pebbles back to nature by throwing them back into the sea. As for those of his art works that he created out of unwanted trash, he later disassembled them and returned to the scrapyard). For exponents of Russian avant-garde, the value of an artwork lay in the painted surface of the canvas. For Malevich, this surface represented space since it was a visible projection of multidimensionality. For an artist as a creator Suprematist

forms opened new, superior reality, invisible to an ordinary viewer. The Constructivists endowed Suprematist geometrical forms with real volume by creating first reliefs (this technique was discovered by the Cubists in their collages) and then three-dimensional objects. Constructivism returned to the Cubist principle of thingness: by giving volume to figures and adding the third dimension, the artists changed the status of their works from art objects to real life objects or products, which, in turn, led them to the concept of utilitarianism and then production art.

Although flat surface and volume proved to be a bone of contention between the Constructivists and Suprematists, both of these movements were addressing a similar issue: to reveal the properties and structure of materials to the fullest extent. While some worked primarily with colour and flat geometrical forms, others preferred such materials as metal, tinfoil, wood, and so on, which they used to create their three-dimensional compositions. It was the perception of material that led Malevich to pure forms. He believed that an artist had to choose the most adequate form to reveal colour in its fullness. Lyubov Popova went even further in saying that form prevails over colour, with the latter emphasizing the former, thus, colour is secondary. Constructivist thought moved from form to material: Constructivists prioritized material believing that form and colour only enhanced its inherent qualities. Therefore, they strove to do 'real' work with 'real' materials. Such experiments were a logical step towards the concept of utilitarianism.

Creation of geometrical forms, building compositions and exhibiting the texture of their surfaces became not just an artistic technique but a general strategy of working with materials. The search for formal elements and attributes of the style turned into a method that consisted of constructing objects out of the already existing set of forms. Artistic creation was considered to be a form of engineering or invention. Aesthetic parameters of artworks were replaced by organizational and technical tasks. The shift of artists' intention from creating 'pure art' to producing utilitarian things could be found as early as at the very early stages of planning. The same shift determined the evolutionary development from style to method.

Thus, we can trace back the general course that the exploration and experimentation of these three movements (Cubists, Suprematists, and Constructivists) had taken and that determined those characteristics in style and programme that they all shared. They were addressing the same problems: deconstruction of forms belonging to the real world; search for primary elements to create a new reality; relationship between the reality they created and the real life; interdependence between the form and the colour; and the priority of flat surfaces over volume or vice versa. As for the

technical side, all three movements also demonstrated stylistic similarities such as their interest in clear geometrical schemes constructed out of geometrical planes and lines and the structure of an object. Thus, the evolution from Cubism to Suprematism and Constructivism was following its logical course of development in terms of style and artistic goals.

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